

Stoneface: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Buster Keaton
By Lorraine Viade, Psy.D.



Stoneface tells the story of Buster Keaton, a performer without equal in the world of silent cinema. His physicality and genius in telling stories through movement and action was never fully appreciated. Keaton is totally embodied in a tour de force performance by French Stewart in a production written by his wife, Vanessa Claire Stewart. This is a collaboration of the heart and mind, body and soul. Currently at the Pasadena playhouse, this production is not to be missed. What Stewart achieves is nothing less than theatrical transcendence. He is the voice and the heart of Keaton, whose stone face revealed so little but told everything. It is an amazing tribute.

The play is also about addiction, relapse, recovery and disillusionment throughout Keaton's life. Every line spoken, every movement, every stunt is haunting and graceful. Stewart wears the masks of comedy and tragedy in a way that shows his personal affection and respect for the man. His reenactments of familiar Keaton movie scenes hit every mark. Stewart gives us not only the psychology of the man, but the beauty of his work. Timeless humor is what survived in Keaton's films. Looking at them today, you can truly appreciate what he achieved in movie making.

Keaton was the everyman that things happened to. And while he seemed oblivious to it all, he was not. Even in the depth of his inebriated despair, Keaton was in control of the emotions he could not express. His broken heart was always evident in the sadness in his eyes. In his publicly revealed private life, happiness eluded him for years and his mistakes and choices left him alone and lonely. The loss of his beloved friend, Roscoe Arbuckle, and his failed attempts at marriage seemed to have defeated him, until one

day he met Eleanor who understood what he needed to be whole again. To know how it all turns out, you have to go and see for yourselves.

Stoneface tells Keaton's story with such respect and affection for the man behind the screen that you cannot help but be both moved and amused. Rarely have I seen such synchronicity between what is being said and who is saying it. It is as though the love between Eleanor and Keaton fueled this story.

Or perhaps it is the love of a playwright for her actor. Either way, *Stoneface* is one of those plays that stay with you long after the curtain closes. I give *Stoneface* 5 trains. Get your tickets now.

